OPTIONAL EA, FONSI and DR FORM

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT **EA NUMBER: OR-030-03-023**

BLM Office: Vale District, Jordan Resource Area
Proposed Action Title/Type: Birch Creek Ranch Electric Upgrades & Fuel Spill Pad
Location of Proposed Action: T.27S., R.43 E., Sec. 18 N1/2
Applicant (if any): N/A

Conformance With Applicable Land Use Plan:
This proposed action is subject to the following land use plans:

NAME OF PLAN	DATE APPROVED
Southeast Oregon Resource Management Plan	December 2002
Main, West Little and North Fork Owyhee National Wild and Scenic Rivers Management Plan and Environmental Assessment	September 1993

This plan has been reviewed to determine if the proposed action conforms with the land use plan terms and conditions as required by CFR 1610.5.

REMARKS: The Vale BLM District manages the Birch Creek and Morrison Ranches as historic cultural properties bordering the Owyhee Wild and Scenic River in southeast Oregon. Isolated from normal rural/urban conveniences such as running water, electricity, and telephone lines, the ranch is dependent upon well-water, solar power and diesel generators, and satellite phone or radio communications for maintenance of caretaker living quarters approaching normal livability standards.

NEED FOR PROPOSED ACTION: There are three separate components to the proposed action, as follows:

1) The existing diesel generator which provides electricity to the main living quarters at Birch Creek is currently situated on a wooden pallet within 30 feet of the house, and is exposed to nature's elements throughout the year. (See attached Photo 1). Not only does that visual intrusion clash with the overall historic rural landscape, but the noise of the generator adversely impacts the residents of the house. By housing the generator in a small, ready-made shed that visually matches the other historic structures at Birch Creek, the current visual intrusion can be mitigated, as well as the noise from the generator. Also, such an enclosure would be a strong deterrent to potential vandalism or abuse of equipment by certain lawless segments of society.

2) The electrical system that provides power to the Bunkhouse and Shop is outdated and needs to be replaced. These buildings are some of the original structures at the Birch Creek Ranch, are not open to the public and are used by the caretaker as a shop and storage area. The electrical system is comprised of an overhead power line, interior lights and 110 volt outlets. There is no safety switch or electrical panel and the power is supplied by a low hanging, overhead wire stretched from the Caretakers House to the Bunkhouse that, for safety reasons, must be abandoned. At the time of abandonment, the entire electrical system should be upgraded and replaced.

3) The entire electrical system that provides power to the Caretakers House needs upgrading. There is no safety switch to kill power to the system; the underground electrical wiring running from the generator to the circuit-breaker panel is placed directly in the ground; and the existing panel only has two circuit breakers to provide power for the interior lights,

outlets and power supply going to the nearby Shop. Currently, all of these components are running through one circuit breaker and the potential to overload the system is great.

4) Currently, no spill pad exists for motor vehicles to park upon when fueling from the 1000-gallon tank located near the old barn at the ranch. Minor fuel leaks could potentially lead to environmental degradation. A 10' x 10' reinforced concrete spill pad would serve as a barrier to soil and water contamination in the event of a leaking incident.

DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED ACTION:

1) This segment of the project would involve recessing a 12' by 16' concrete building into the side of the hill near the existing generator. The building has been constructed using natural stone similar to other buildings in the area. (See attached Photos 2 and 3, of existing historic root cellar and prefab building.) Installation of this building will require excavating into the side of the hill to create a 16' by 16' hole that the building will be set in. The finished floor elevation will be 6" above the current parking area. The building will sit upon 8" of crushed aggregate and a foundation drain will be incorporated to drain water away from the building. Currently the structure has a flat roof; therefore, a gabled, composite roof will be added, matching other buildings in the area. If resulting visual contrast needs further mitigation, the doors of the structure may be painted or covered with faux wood laminate to further blend with other doorways at the ranch. The generator will be moved inside the building and the natural gas and power lines will be re-routed and reconnected. Disturbance will include digging and backfilling trenches from the propane fuel tanks and the power post as well as the excavation and backfilling required for the building.

2) This portion of the project includes using a backhoe to dig a trench from the Caretakers House to the north side of the Shop, installing approximately 100 feet of underground metal conduit and wire, installing a safety switch and circuit breaker panel box on the side of the exterior of the Shop, running new wiring inside the building and installing overhead lights, 110V outlets and a 220 V outlet. The existing overhead power line will be left for historical visual value but will be disconnected from electrical power sources.

3) This portion of the project includes installing a safety switch inside the small generator house, running approximately 70 feet of underground metal conduit and wire to span from the generator to the panel box, and installing a new 8-circuit-breaker panel box. This panel box will provide power to both the Caretakers House and the Shop and will be located where the existing 2-circuit-breaker box is located, on the north wall of the Caretakers House. A backhoe would dig a 2' wide by 2' deep trench for placement of the conduit. After placement, the trench would be backfilled and surface grade would be restored to its original condition. An electrical contractor would place the conduit, supply and pull the wire, supply and hang the new breaker box, and complete all electrical connections required to restore power to the buildings.

4) The reinforced, 6"-thick concrete fueling pad will require excavating 10" of material within a 10' x 10' area adjacent to the 1000-gallon gasoline tank, backfilling with 4" of crushed aggregate and placing concrete so that the top of the finished pad will be even with the existing ground level.

Critical Element	Affected		Critical Element	Affected	
	Yes	No		Yes	No
Air Quality		x	T&E Species		x
ACECs		x	Wastes, Hazardous/Solid		x
Cultural Resources	x		Water Quality		x
Farmlands, Prime/Unique		x	Wetlands/Riparian Zones		x
Floodplains		x	Wild & Scenic Rivers	x	
Invasive, Nonnative Species		x	Environmental Justice		x
Nat. Amer. Rel. Concerns		x	Wilderness		x
			Adverse Energy Impact		x

DESCRIPTION OF IMPACTS:

Minor noise and dust pollution will be evident during actual installation of building, electrical conduit and fuel spill pad. Long-term impacts are essentially limited to visual impacts of the new building housing the electrical generator, the new switch and circuit breaker box on the side of the Shop, the new circuit breaker box on the Caretakers House, and the fuel spill pad adjacent to the gasoline storage tank. These visual impacts and associated benefits must be balanced against the Owyhee River's outstandingly remarkable scenic and cultural values, and National Register of Historic Places contributing factors for the Birch Creek site. Other specific impacts for each component of the proposed action are as follows:

1) Soil disturbances for the generator building will be limited to the immediate area. Excavation will remove several inches of previously disturbed ground beneath the front half of the building installation, as well as roughly three to four cubic yards from the base of the hillside. Trenches running from the power post and the propane tanks to the building will be the only other disturbed areas. All backhoe work will be completed from the existing parking area or within the excavation itself; no cross-country travel is expected. Visual impacts will blend in better with the historic landscape because the new building will match the surrounding buildings and the generator will be hidden from view.

2) Soil disturbance created from digging the trench will be the greatest impact. Mitigating measures can minimize the impacts of the backhoe and the disturbed earth. Also, trenching will be limited to previously disturbed ground. The conduit and wiring will be installed underground and the safety switch and breaker box will be mounted on the north end of the building. The breaker box will not be hidden from view, but many other buildings in the area already have breaker boxes. All other modifications will be performed on the inside of the building, which is not typically available for public viewing.

3) Soil disturbance from trenching would be similar to that described above. The new 8-circuit breaker box would be larger than the existing 2-circuit box.

4) Soil disturbances for the gasoline spill pad will be negligible. The backhoe will be used to excavate 10" of soil, the hole will be filled with crushed aggregate overlain by reinforced concrete, and the area will be re-graded. Currently, the area surrounding the fuel tank consists of previously disturbed material and a roadway. (See attached Photo 4.) The finished concrete pad will set flush with the ground level so that visual impacts will be minimal. Excavated material will be spread evenly over adjacent ground.

DESCRIPTION OF MITIGATION MEASURES AND RESIDUAL IMPACTS:

Fire restrictions would be adhered to during all phases of installation. Final siting of the prefab generator building would be coordinated with the BLM visual resource staff specialist and/or archeologist, to minimize visual degradation while maintaining the current historic landscape setting within constraints of Wild and Scenic River values. Excavation of the small, previously undisturbed portion of hillside would be closely monitored by a BLM resource specialist to monitor cultural impacts. Work would immediately stop to allow further mitigation if significant cultural resources are encountered during excavation. All excavation would be minimized to the least amount necessary to achieve project completion.

Residual impacts would include a quieter, more vandal-resistant generator installation with a visual impact more in tune with the current historic landscape. The fuel spill pad would add a minor, substantially unnoticeable visual impact to the gasoline tank site. Also, some current safety issues would be solved by upgraded wiring in the Shop/Bunkhouse and fuel spill containment at the gas tank.

Persons/Agencies Consulted: Vern Pritchard, Vale BLM District Engineer
Natalie Sudman, Jordan Resource Area Archeologist
Jean Findley, Vale BLM Botany/T&E Species Specialist
Kim Duering, Vale BLM Safety Officer
Cynthia Tait, Vale BLM Fisheries Specialist
Dave Porterfield, Vale BLM Hazmat Specialist
Jon Sadowski, Jordan Resource Area Wildlife/T&E Spec.
Jack Wenderoth, Jordan Resource Area Hydrologist

Preparer: Tom Christensen, Jordan Resource Area Outdoor Recreation Planner
Date: August 19, 2003

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

I have reviewed this environmental assessment, including the explanation and resolution of any potentially significant environmental impacts. There are no T&E species affected by the proposed action. There are no adverse impacts to historic properties, ACECs, or Wild & Scenic Rivers. Moreover, the various components of the proposed action will correct safety deficiencies recently identified for the Birch Creek facility. Therefore, I have determined that the proposed action with the mitigation measures described below will not have any significant impacts on the human environment and that an EIS in not required. I have determined that the proposed project is in conformance with the approved land use plan.

Authorized Official: s/Jerry Taylor Date: August 21, 2003

DECISION RECORD

It is my decision to implement the proposal as described in EA #OR-030-03-023 with the mitigation measures identified below.

MITIGATION MEASURES/REMARKS:

Monitor and restrict project activities accordingly, to minimize chances for wildfire ignition. Ensure proper fire-fighting equipment is onsite and readily available during heavy equipment operations.

Carefully position the prefab building installation, to best blend in with the current historic landscape and surrounding building architecture, and to minimize extent of soil excavation.

Halt activities if Jordan Resource Area Archeologist notes contact with cultural materials during ground disturbing activities. Mitigate impacts as directed by Archeologist.

Authorized Official: s/ Jerry Taylor Date: 9/16/2003

Photo 1 – Site of generator installation

Photo 2 – Existing historic root cellar

Photo 3 – Prefabricated shed to enclose generator

Photo 4 – Site of 1000-gallon gasoline tank needing fuel spill pad